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ABSTRACT

The study described in this report investigated the effects of field-based reflective practice on preservice teachers' sense of self-efficacy. Subjects in the study were 24 senior elementary majors participating in a 4-week field experience. Twelve students were assigned to the experimental school and 12 were assigned to two control schools. Each school had a graduate teaching assistant (GTA) who observed the preservice teachers during selected teaching experiences. In addition, the GTA in the experimental group conferenced extensively with each preservice teacher after each observed lesson to help, through coaching episodes, make sense of problematic situations. Biweekly, students in the treatment group were brought together for networking where they could recast, rethink, and bring new meaning to their practice. Pre- and post-measures of subjects' self-efficacy were obtained using the Teacher Efficacy Scale, open-ended questionnaires, and reflective journals. Results suggest that sharing experiences and strategies with cooperating teachers, peers, and the GTA helped subjects in the treatment group become self-assured reflectors. The sharing also had a significant positive impact on preservice teachers' sense of self-efficacy. (Contains 9 references.) (LL)

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Enhancing Preservice Teachers' Self-Efficacy Through a Field-Based Program of Reflective Practice

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Abstract

The purpose of the study was to determine the effects of field-based reflective practice on preservice teachers' sense of self-efficacy. Subjects in the study were 24 senior elementary majors participating in a four-week field experience. Unlike the 12 subjects assigned to the control group, the 12 treatment group subjects participated in an on-site, supervised program of reflective practice. Pre- and post-measures of subjects' self-efficacy were obtained using the Teacher Efficacy Scale, open-ended questionnaires, and reflective journals.

An analysis of the covariance, using the pretest scores on the Teacher Efficacy Scale as a covariate indicated that at an alpha of .05, the treatment group mean on the Teacher Efficacy Scale was significantly higher than that of the control group. An analysis of the qualitative data supported and provided insight into the statistical outcome. Results of the study suggested that participation in a field-based program of reflective practice had a significant positive impact on preservice teachers' sense of self-efficacy.

Enhancing Preservice Teachers' Self-Efficacy Through a Field-Based Program of Reflective Practice

Students want teachers who will engage them in optimal learning situations (Phelan, Davidson, & Cao, 1992). Decisive teachers who are flexible and thoughtful function more effectively and confidently in today's complex classrooms than teachers who teach primarily by rote (Gibson & Dembo, 1984).

Basic to the efficacious teacher may be the ability to be reflective, which Wellington (1991) defined as the ability to look back at the teaching and learning that has occurred and engage in a cycle of thought and action based on professional experiences. Calderhead (1989) refines this definition of reflection to include the metacognitive processes of comparison, self-direction and evaluation. Canning (1991) found that reflectivity can help teachers develop their own educational visions and improve their self-image, which may be linked to self-efficacy. Because self-efficacy describes how one is able to visualize success and execute a desired outcome (Bandura, 1977, 1982), it may help determine a teacher's effectiveness. When a teacher education program emphasizes self-worth and engages the preservice teacher in reflective practice, students tend to be decisive and assured (Biddle &

Lasley, 1991). A project developed to enable veteran teachers to facilitate reflectivity in preservice teachers found reflective coaching was positively correlated with greater feelings of self-efficacy among preservice teachers (Nolan & Hillkirk, 1991).

The present study was a preliminary effort to examine the impact of a field-based program of reflective practice on preservice teachers' self-efficacy.

Methodology

Subjects

Subjects in this study were 24 senior elementary education majors, with an average age of 22 years, all of whom were attending a large Southern University. All but one of the subjects were female.

Procedure

Subjects were randomly placed in three elementary schools during the spring semester for field experience associated with a block of methods courses. Twelve of the students were assigned to the treatment school, and 12 were assigned to two control schools. Each school had a graduate teaching assistant (GTA) who observed the preservice teachers during selected teaching experiences. In addition, the GTA in the experimental group conferenced extensively with each preservice

teacher after each observed lesson. The focus of the conference was to help the preservice teacher through coaching episodes to make sense of problematic situations. Biweekly, students in the treatment group were brought together for networking where they could recast, rethink, and bring new meaning to their practice.

Data were gathered using the Teacher Efficacy Scale (TES) and two questionnaires constructed for the purposes of this study. One questionnaire was given to determine preservice teachers' attitudes concerning reflectivity, and the other to determine the cooperating teachers' opinions concerning preservice teachers' ability to reflect. Journals were kept by the treatment group subjects and the GTA as a record of impressions during the field experience.

An analysis of covariance using the pretest scores on the Teacher Efficacy Test as the covariate was used to compare, at an alpha of .05, the post TES scores of the control and treatment groups. Trends in qualitative data were noted and compared for consistency with quantitative results.

Results

An analysis of covariance using the pretest as a covariate revealed that the post-mean score on the

Teacher Efficacy Test for the experimental group was significantly higher than the mean score of the control group. That is, teachers in the treatment group were more efficacious than those in the control group.

An analysis of the narrative data showed that the treatment group, unlike the control group, journalled more insightfully about their teaching experiences, and that treatment group questionnaire responses demonstrated an increased reflectivity and decisiveness.

Conclusion

Sharing experiences and strategies with cooperating teachers, peers, and the GTA appeared to have helped subjects in the treatment group become more confident and self-assured. The experimental group often stated that they found themselves thinking more, and that they felt more confident. Control students were less efficacious and appeared more concerned with the immediate implementation of classroom procedures than with accommodating the individual needs of the students.

This study supports literature which suggests that preservice teachers who participate in a field-based program of reflective practice become better reflectors and more efficacious. It is suggested then, that if

teachers are to be adequately prepared as confident, classroom decision-makers, it will be necessary to engage these teachers in reflective practice within a classroom context. More efficacious teachers will result if those in the university are empowered with coaching and networking skills to assist preservice teachers in handling diverse educational challenges. Questions remain however as to the most expedient format of such a program, its place within the chronology of preservice training, and the most advantageous pre-program experiences for participating preservice teachers.

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